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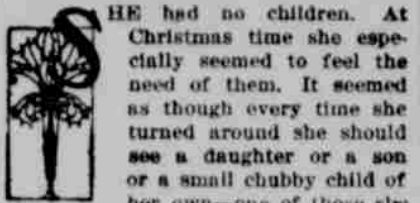
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## Christmas Journey

A True Story for Grown-Ups by Mary Graham Donner



HE had no children. At Christmas time she especially seemed to feel the need of them. It seemed as though every time she turned around she should see a daughter or a son or a small chubby child of her own—one of those she had dreamed of and who had never stepped outside of her dreams.

Yes! She, Gertrude Harding, was a "born mother" to whom no children had been born.

But this year she had forgotten something most important to be done. And it was only several days before Christmas.

She went down town, made her purchase after quite a delay and left the shop.

Outside were three small children, their faces close against the window pane, their eyes gleaming, their small ill-clad bodies tense and quivering with emotion.

"Aw, gee, look at it stop at the station! There, she's off the track now! No, she ain't. She's back on again."

The second child was reading a sign. "They says that in this here shop that it's the land where the dreams of children come true. D'ya suppose they's kiddin'?"

The third child, a little girl, who was clutching what once had been a doll was looking at one in the shop's window.

"If I could jes' touch her hair," she sighed.

"Would you like to go inside the shop?" Gertrude Harding asked the children.

They looked at her abruptly. "D'ya mean it?"

And through the shop, straight to the children's department she took them.

It was a revelation to her to realize the joy that was derived by these children from the intimate contact with toys they knew they could never own.

They had gone inside one of the big shops and had been treated as well as anybody; they had not been afraid. They had looked to their heart's content.

"It's true—what they's said," the children agreed afterward, "in there it is the land all right, where children's dreams come true." For the reality of Fairyland had been expressed by the marvelous and magical toys and games and gay decorations of the Christmas shop.

If Gertrude Harding told herself afterward, these children had so loved a trip into the mystery of a children's shop, were there not others who would like to journey forth into the world of toys, too?

She thought it over. And did not stop there. She rang up a certain number and asked for the matron.

"You're the matron of the Children's hospital, aren't you? Well, I wondered if any of your children would care to go with me tomorrow and take a trip through the children's toy shops? They're most attractively fixed up this year and some of them have special attractions, a Santa Claus and many other wondrous features!"

So Gertrude Harding called for the children. There were 15 who were able to go and of that 15 the majority were motherless.

with the thrill of happiness that a bird sings with when first he feels the warmth and sweet fragrance of the spring.

He had never been asked to sing before like this—in a big shop where people were and where people listened to him, not because he was being visited in a hospital and must do his part to entertain the visitors, but because somehow or other they liked his voice.

It rang out true and strong. He shifted the crutch which he had never been without and which he would never be without to the end of his days, and then he was asked to sing an encore.

His face was flushed with the pleasure of doing something which was liked in this big outside world.

He looked at Santa Claus and beamed.

He had already sung a popular song which he had learned from the squeaking talking machine which someone had given the hospital when it was no longer fit for the home, and now he thought he would sing something better. Somehow he felt it would be proper, and vaguely perhaps he felt it would show a gratitude for Christmas that went deeper. Dimly he thought these things.

Someone had taught them a hymn in the hospital, a hymn which he had always loved. It made one feel better, stronger, happier somehow. It was a very glorious hymn he had always thought.

And he sang:

"It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold;  
Peace on the earth, good will to men,  
From heaven's all-gracious King;  
The world in solemn stillness lay  
To hear the angels sing."

Right to the end of the hymn he sang and the people thanked him and Santa Claus told him it had been lovely and gave him a man-like clap on the back.

Gertrude Harding had felt a lump in her throat and had smiled with eyes that were misty.

So the angels did bend near the earth—even in these days—and even over hospitals where crippled and ill children were. It was the humans, not the angels, who forgot and who went through life not thinking!

Back to the hospital she took the children late, late that afternoon. The hospital was in semi-darkness. Children who had been too recently operated upon or who could not leave their beds sat up as best they could to hear of the news of the outside world.

Little white-clad figures listened to the glowing accounts brought to them of the great life which went on beyond the ward.

And for every little child who had to stay in the hospital, Gertrude Harding had brought a small present, only a trifling one, but a remembrance from the great world.

Then the hospital rules which had been lifted for a few minutes after the ones who had been out so late had come back, were in order again, and there was silence in the ward, and soon there would come sleep.

When she got home that evening, tired but very, very happy, she said to herself:

"There are born mothers, yes! And there are born children, too! Children who need to be loved as much as women who need children to love. And though there is a difference between those of one's very own, and those who are not, it seems as though no one who is a 'born mother' should go through life, walking blindly by the many motherless children."

"For every childless mother there is a motherless child to whom one can give some of the love and interest and the pride which would otherwise go to waste."

In her sleep she seemed to hear the Christmas carol which the hospital had had sung and she knew what had been revealed to her.

She had traveled into the land of children at Christmas time and had smiled the smile that can be smiled when one gets a look at the heart of a child!

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